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The Need for an Inventory of Ancient Sites for Anthropological Research in Northeastern Thailand

by

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Abstract

The Northeastern part of Thailand abounds with earthworks, the majority of which are the remains of ancient cities and towns. Over 300 sites are distributed along the valleys of the rivers *Mun* and *Chi*. The presence of the remains of these ancient cities and towns indicates that the region was once the most populous area of the country, and perhaps of all Southeast Asia as well. Unfortunately, as yet there has been no systematic and comprehensive archaeological and anthropological study done of these ancient sites. Many of them are going to be lost forever due to large scale devastation caused by the construction of irrigation dams, water reservoirs, highways and buildings which are part of the economic development programmes initiated by the Thai government as well as by the Mekong Valley Project of the United Nations. These archaeological sites, when carefully studied, will yield information valuable to an understanding of the society and culture of the local population, whose social organization and way of life are going to be affected by these planned changes. In addition, the results of such a systematic and comprehensive study will shed light on some missing links in the history of ancient Southeast Asia. This paper suggests that what is needed at this present time is the preparation of a well-defined inventory of these ancient sites which can be used for future surveys, excavations and studies.

Geographical Situation

The Northeast of Thailand today is the scene of a complex situation. It is the most barren part of the country due to the poor quality of its soil and a scarcity of water to supply the agricultural sector during the dry season. Arable land is limited to scattered alluvial plains built up by the major rivers (*Mun*, *Chi* and *Mekong* and their tributaries), while the rest of this vast region is unproductive and perhaps suitable only for rearing cattle. The population is distributed in scattered villages which are characterized by clusters of houses located mostly on island-like uplands, separated from one another by the alluvial plains.

The entire region of the Northeast is separated from the rest of the country by high mountain ranges: the *Phetchabun* and *Dong Phrayayen* in the west, and the *Sankamphaeng* and *Phnom Dong Rak* in the south. This geographical position has caused the people in

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the Northeast to be isolated, and consequently their way of life and cultural patterns are different from those in the rest of Thailand. They are considered to be illiterate, clinging to superstition and living in very poor conditions. Further, the Northeast is presenting the Thai government with ethnic and political problems since its population consists of the Thai-Lao, who are culturally related to the Laos in the Kingdom of Lao; the Khmers, who still speak Cambodian and the Vietnamese, who are refugee from Vietnam. This situation has made the Northeast a sensitive region where centrifugal elements have to be removed and an attempt must be made to integrate it into the national society.

Planned Change

Because of the reasons mentioned above, the Northeast has become the area that the government has to give priority to in its socio-economic development programme. Roads and highways are being constructed to link the region with Bangkok; irrigation dams, feeding canals and water-reservoirs are being built in several areas of the region to supply water and increase the amount of arable land. Community development personnel, technical assistants and health officers are being sent to guide and advise the villagers as they adapt themselves to a new way of life, new technology and new sanitation. Further, at the international level, the Northeast is included as an area for development in the Mekong Valley Project of the United Nations Economic and Social Council. This project is an internationally supported effort to harness and control the Mekong River for the benefit of the people living in the countries along its course. Its ultimate physical purpose is to produce hydroelectric power and to improve navigation, drainage, and flood control on the Lower Mekong and its tributaries; its social purpose is to raise the standard of living of the peoples of the four riparian countries, namely Laos, Cambodia, Vietnam and Thailand.

These development programmes which are now underway have resulted in a big change in both the social organization and the topography of the Northeast. Roads and highways have linked the villages to the urban centres, and caused an influx of people who were formerly living in remote and isolated areas to towns and cities. In the towns and cities they find new jobs and thus have a new way of life which departs completely from the old one. Money economy is gaining momentum in the traditional village society and this presents the villagers with the period of rapid change in their economy and culture and consequently, a great deal of conflicts in their present way of life.

The impact of modernization on the people of the Northeast is, no doubt, a matter of grave concern. It cannot be minimized with if the goal in raising the living standard of the people to the level of material and psychological well-being is to be achieved. To understand the future of the Northeast as well as its present, anthropological research is probably the best means since it can provide some insight for its culture and society. And if anthropo-

logical research is deemed to be significant to an understanding of the Northeast, it is necessary to start collecting all the data relevant to this study immediately, before much of it has been lost forever due to the rapid change in the topography of the region and the social mobility underway.

The Relevancy of the Past

Study of the past is an important dimension in the study of the culture and society of the Northeast. Judging from extant archaeological remains, the region has been inhabited since time immemorial. Williams-Hunt (1950) estimated from his survey of aerial photographs that there appear to be more than 200 irregular earthworks, most of which are the remains of ancient towns, both large and small, in the Northeast. This indicates that the region used to be the most populous area of the country. From recent archaeological surveys and excavations in the Northeast, Wilhelm G. Solheim II (1967) puts forward the opinion that the Northeastern region was once a centre of bronze-working, which can be dated back to about 2500 B.C. The inhabitants knew how to cast and utilize bronze before the people of India and China. Some vessels and tools decorated with scroll and triangle patterns originated here and later spread to Island Southeast Asia. Donn T. Bayard (1971) postulates from the results of excavations at *Non Nok Tha* that rice was first cultivated in the Northeast about 6000 years ago, and that the people had domesticated animals, probably cattle, dog and pig. The published reports of archaeological surveys in the Northeast carried out by the Department of Fine Arts (1960 and 1967) reveal the discovery of many religious sites containing both brick and stone structures, as well as are objects such as images of the Buddha and Hindu deities which date back to the *Dvaravati* period (6th–11th century A.D.) and the *Lop Buri* period (11th–13th century A.D.). Some inscription stones found in the Northeast referred to the lost kingdom of *Sri Janasa* (The office of the Prime Minister, 1970), while others mentioned the construction of sanctuaries by the Khmer kings of the Angkorian period, such as Suriyavarman I and Jayavarman VII. Apart from these evidences, there are many local chronicles which relate the stories of ancient kingdoms, cities, and religious monuments. For example, the *Urangkadhat* chronicle talks about the Kingdom of *Kotrabun*, its monarchs, and the construction of the *stupa* of *Phra That Phanom* in *Nakhon Phanom* which is the most sacred site of the Northeast.

However, inspite of the evidence cited above, the Northeast is, historically speaking, a missing link in the ancient history of Southeast Asia. Although it has been popularized by such archaeologists as Solheim, Bayard, and their colleagues, all studies have been confined to the realm of prehistory. There has been no conscious attempt by any archaeologists or historians to conduct any research which would enable us to reconstruct the proto-history and history of the Northeast. Such a study would present the past lifeways of the people,

and would provide a background to an understanding of contemporary Northeastern society and culture. A few scholars, including Prince Damrong (1949), hypothesized from the Chinese sources that the location of the *Funan* kingdom (which is, so far, the oldest state in Southeast Asia) was somewhere in the Northeast. Such a supposition, although possible, has not yet been proven by any archaeological field research.

Problems of Methods and Approach in the Study of the Northeast

In our own point of view, there is not sufficient data, at the moment, to reconstruct the proto-history and the history of the Northeast in relation both to the history of Thailand, as well as to the history of Southeast Asia in general. This is due to the lack of interest in the study of earthworks (most of which are moated cities and towns) among archaeologists, anthropologists and historians working on and studying the Northeastern region. There is an apparent short-coming in the archaeological study of the Northeast, and perhaps also all over Thailand; that is, there is a wide discrepancy in terms of theoretical approach, methodology, and techniques between research in the prehistoric period and research in the historic period. The archaeologists who are dealing with the prehistoric period are social scientists who have equipped themselves with anthropological knowledge and concepts. They tend to rely more on the quality and quantity of the data they have collected through their surveys and excavations. Their investigations and their interpretations of their findings are not aimed merely at establishing a chronology and description, but rather are aimed at establishing a cultural history and a reconstruction of past lifeways. In contrast to this, the scholars who are concerned, and perhaps dominate the historic period in the Northeast are merely art historians. They have confined their study and focus of interest only to archaeological monuments and objects which bear artistic designs. They rarely make any survey trips to discover new sites, except a few-days journey to tour around religious sites such as the *wats* and sanctuaries in order to take pictures and study the artistic designs and patterns of their *stupas*, *chedis*, *bods*, *viharns*, and the images of the Buddha and deities. What they have contributed to the archaeological literature is only a relative chronology based on art designs and motifs. This chronology is satisfactory for the main outline of the proto-history and history of the Northeast, but is not useful for an understanding of indigenous culture and society. Because of this limited method of study, other archaeological items such as earthworks and stone structures which are of equal importance in the writing of social and cultural history are neglected. Consequently, the archaeological knowledge of the historic period seemed to be limited to a history of art and religion; accounts of other aspects of society and culture such as economy, politics and the way of life of the people are not known.

If we are to gain an understanding of the Northeast, archaeological investigations and studies of the earthworks are imperative. First, they must be surveyed thoroughly, with

their locations and distributions mapped out. They should then be registered as national archaeological or historical monuments in order to prevent the destruction of their walls, moats and sacred sites. Second, as the number of earthworks is large, it is necessary for a certain number of them to be selected as key sites for further excavation. One focus of interest in the excavation should be on comparative stratigraphy and cultural chronology. Scientific dating techniques such as radiocarbon, thermoluminescence and pollen analysis should be applied in order to cross-check the new findings with the relative chronology based on artistic designs. This would provide a reliable and valid chronological framework for the reconstruction of the history of the area.

Third, the research work should not terminate when a single site and its associated area are excavated and its culture history reconstructed. The site should be viewed as a unit of settlement, in relation to others in the Northeastern region. Ethnographical and historical accounts, as well as other sources, should be analyzed and studied together with the data obtained from the field surveys and excavations. Then an attempt to reconstruct the history of the Northeast should be made.

The best archaeological excavations so far conducted on earthwork in Thailand are the excavations of Bronson (n.d.) at *Chansen* in the province of *Nakhon Sawan*, Central Thailand. This earthwork is an ancient town which, when dated from its surface artifacts, belongs to the *Dvaravati* period (6th–11th century A.D.). But excavation has revealed several archaeological levels, the lowest of which can be dated back to the late metal period. Other upper layers reveal a pottery sequence which dates from the first century A.D. to the 11th century A.D., when the town declined and was perhaps abandoned. The excavations reveal not only the time sequence of the town, but also cultural contacts with India and the Northeast, economic data, and some perspectives on the inhabitants' way of life. It seems to us that the archaeological investigations and studies in the ancient towns like *Chansen* will contribute to the possibility of a reconstruction of the proto-history of the *Chao Phraya* Delta area if excavations are conducted in other ancient towns of the same region. But since Bronson's work at *Chansen*, no stratigraphic excavations have taken place in ancient towns either in Central Thailand, or in other regions of the country. On the contrary, most digging is confined only to unearthing religious monuments like the bases of the *stupas*, *chedis* and *viharns*.

In spite of the inadequacy of stratigraphic digging in the investigations of ancient towns in the Central Plain, the situation is not so bad when compared to that of the Northeast. This is because the number of the ancient towns and cities in the Central Plain is less than in the Northeast, and, moreover, most of the Central Plains sites are known to archaeologists and historians through both historical documents and archaeological monuments. The Northeast, on the contrary, has no historical depth, so it has to rely more on archaeological surveys and excavations in the study of the time sequence and the distribution of its ancient cities and towns before its history can be reconstructed.

The Significance of Ancient Towns to Anthropological Study

The study of ancient towns is of considerable importance because each town not only encompasses within its borders various archaeological sites and objects to be excavated and studied, but also tells the researcher its geographical position in relation to the socio-economic life of its inhabitants. One is likely to gain some insight into the size of the city or town in relation to the arable land, the population size, the irrigation system, the transportation system which was through canals, rivers and roads, and the communication system with cities and towns in the other areas. Although Williams-Hunt has written an article about the distribution of over 200 ancient sites along the basins of the rivers *Mun* and *Chi*, he has not yet gone into the detail proposed by this study, and no one seems to be interested in his article. To us, the presence of these ancient sites, most of which are moated cities and towns, is an index of the development of urban areas and centres in the past. To map out their locations and distribution in a well unified map will shed light on the historical geography of the region, and will provide a background for detailed study in the future. Anthropological-archaeological research on the ancient cities and towns will, no doubt, serve to bridge the gap between the prehistoric and historic periods in the Northeast, and consequently will add new knowledge about the missing links of ancient history of Southeast Asia, as well as adding to our understanding of the present day society and culture of the Northeast.

The significance in the study of ancient cities and towns has long occupied our thought and interest. It has been the main concern of our anthropological-archaeological studies and field trips for 7 years. We have already surveyed various parts of Thailand, and by using aerial photographs have been able to map out over 400 ancient sites, the majority of which are ancient cities and towns. Generally speaking, these cities and towns can be divided into two types: the irregular-shaped town, and the regular shaped town. (See Photos. 1 and 2) At the present time, it is hard to state with certainty whether the irregular shaped towns came before the regular shaped ones, except in some regions where a chronology has been established based on extensive historical and archaeological data. So far as our study is concerned, we can postulate that in Central Thailand (Vallibhotama 1971) most of the ancient

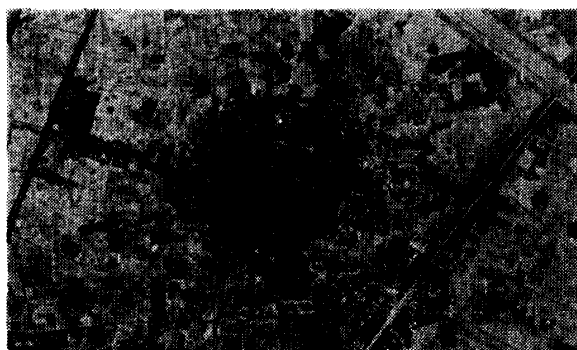


Photo. 1 The town plan of *Chansen* in the province of *Nakhon Sawan*, Central Thailand. Irregular type.



Photo. 2 The town plan of an ancient town found in the province of Singhburi. Central Thailand, Regular type.

cities and towns of irregular shape were associated with surface finds that belong to the *Dvaravati* culture (6th–11th century A.D.). Big cities which flourished as inland ports in the early historic period developed along the basins of the major rivers in the delta, namely the cities of *U-Thong* and *Nakhon Chaisri* in the basin of the *Tha Chin* River, the city of *Lop Buri* on the bank of the *Lop Buri* River (a branch of the *Chao Phraya* River), the city of *Ku Bua* in the basin of the *Mae Klong* River, and the city of *Si Mahosot* (Sri Mahosod) in *Prachinburi* on the plain of the *Bang Pakong* River. They were of an irregular shaped city plan; some of them were abandoned sometime during the *Lop Buri* period (10th–12th century A.D.), while others persisted until the *Ayutthaya* period (14th–18th century A.D.). However, these cities were replaced as economic and cultural centres by the cities of *Supanaphum* (*Suphanburi*), *Ratburi*, *Phetchburi* and *Ayodhya*, which assumed the regular shaped plan of either rectangular or square. These later cities developed sometime during the *Lop Buri* period, for most of the major finds thus far discovered are associated with the *Lop Buri* culture. It seems to us that only one type of regular earthworks can be stated to belong to the *Dvaravati* period in the Central Plain, that is, the ring shaped one. They are of a small size, probably a small town, found in *Nakhon Sawan*, *Nakhon Nayok* and *Saraburi*.

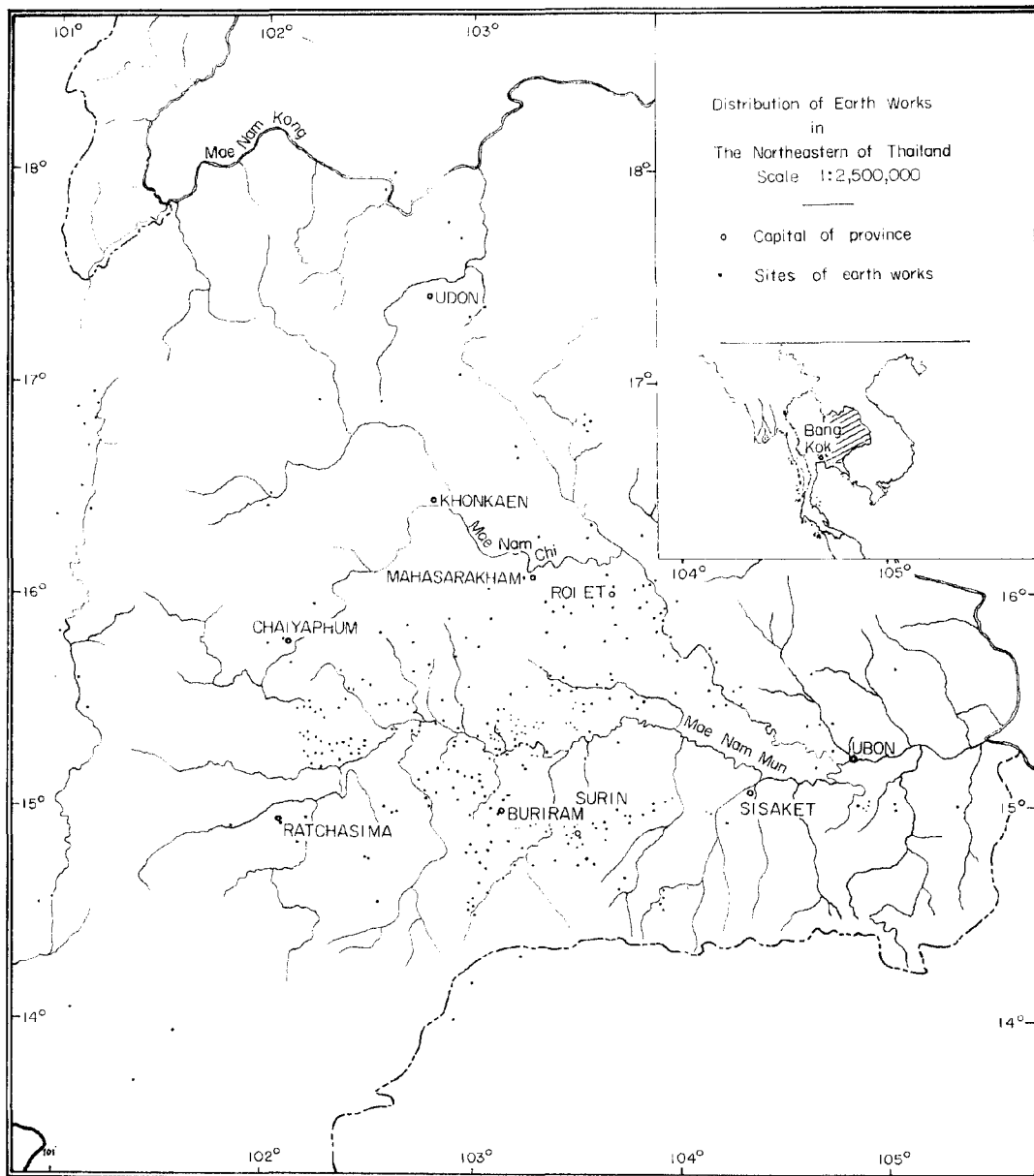
All cities and towns which developed before the *Ayutthaya* period were surrounded with earth walls and moats; a few were enclosed with double or triple ramparts, for example, the city of *Sukhothai* and the town of *Traitrung*. But during the *Ayutthaya* period, as cannon were introduced into the warfare of the country, there was some modification in the construction of the city wall. Cities such as *Ayutthaya*, *Kamphaengpet*, *Phitsanulok*,

and *Lop Buri*, were surrounded with fortified walls constructed with brick and laterite. The clay wall, however, with its irregular plan, still existed in the less important towns of the country.

In Southern Thailand fewer moated cities and towns appear. Most settled areas are located along the strips of sand dunes in the coastal areas, so they are long in length but narrow in width. With this space limitation, the towns and cities appear in small sizes, such as the cities of *Phra Wieng* in *Nakhon Si Thammarat* and *Sathing Phra* in *Songkhla*. They are of rectangular plan surrounded with earth wall and located on the sand dunes. From the surface finds such as pottery and art objects, these cities can be dated back only to the *Lop Buri* period. At the moment, there are no remains of moated cities and towns in the South which can be dated earlier than this. The old cities of *Nakhon Si Thammarat* and *Songkhla*, judging by their brick ramparts, are of the *Ayutthaya* period. There are a few round shaped earthworks in *Phatthalung*, but whether or not they are the ancient towns of a pre-*Lop Buri* period has not yet been determined due to the inadequacy of the archaeological evidence. Concerning the *Dvaravati* period in Southern Thailand, it might be hypothesized that no moated cities were constructed. This is supported by the presence of an ancient city in *Chaiya* in *Surat Thani*, in which various *Dvaravati* and *Srivijaya* monuments and objects were found on the sand dune, but no moat and clay wall surrounded the town.

The plans of the cities and towns of Northern Thailand differ from those of the Centre and South because of the different geographical environment. The earliest towns and cities thus far discovered belong to the Kingdom of *Haripunchai* (Haripunjaya) (probably from 8th–13th century A.D.). They are small sized, with an irregular plan, and were established on the plains close to the rivers. This is evident from the presence of the cities of *Lamphun*, *Wiang Tha Kan* and *Wiang Mano*. The plans of the cities and towns in the later period vary in sizes due to their location and socio-economic importance but tend to remain irregular. What makes them remain irregular in plan is that many of them were built on the slopes, or directly on the hills, and were forced to conform to the irregular shape of the slope or the hill. For example, the city of *Phayao* has a gourd plan because the slope on which it is located is shaped like a gourd. The towns of *Phrao*, *Wiang Manora* and *Mae Chai* take the two or three ring-shaped plans because they are on tops of the small hills. Most of the towns on the hills and slopes, except the city of *Phayao*, were probably fort-towns in which people came to stay temporarily during the time of war. We can assume this because they have no potsherds or other finds which would indicate a long period of occupation. There are a few regular planned cities like *Chiang Mai*, *Lampang* (the one on the southern bank of the *Wang* River) and *Chiang Saen* but they are probably of the later period when cannon were used in the war. We assume this because these cities were fortified with brick walls.

When we compare the distribution of moated cities and towns in the Centre, South, and North of Thailand to that of the Northeast, we are surprised to learn that the number of ancient towns and cities of the first three regions numbers less than one third of the number



Map A map showing the distribution of earthworks in the Northeast of Thailand.



Photo. 3 The ancient city of Kantharavijaya with its large reservoir. Amphur Kantharavijaya Mahasarakam Northeastern Thailand.



Photo. 4 The town plan of *Muang Plabpla* in *Nakhon Rajsima* showing the change from the irregular shaped plan to the regular shaped one.

of the Northeast. (See Map) Most of the moated cities and towns in the Northeast are larger in size and more complicated in their plans; they are of irregular shape, with ramparts ranging from single to triple ones. Moreover, many of them show traces of extensions and modifications in some later periods; some have big ponds and large water reservoirs near their location. (See Photo. 3) These sites are crowded along the basins of the rivers *Mun* and *Chi* and their tributaries, which abound with fertile land for wet rice cultivation. Concerning the typology of the moated cities and towns, it is hard at this stage to say that the irregular planned cities are of the earliest period, as are those in the central region. This is because there are but a few regular-shaped town plans. Particularly important is the site with rectangular plan and three ramparts, which has some similarity to the town plan of the ancient city of *Oc-eo* in the *Mekong* Delta, which dates to the *Funan* period (1st-6th century A.D.). The traces of the moats and walls look more worn out than those of many irregular planned cities and towns. However, except these debatable regular planned cities, we may presume from our findings at the moment that most of the ancient cities and towns in the Northeast are of irregular shape. They were associated with the *Dvaravati* culture and in the later periods they received the Khmer culture. Some cities changed their plans to an regular rectangle while others remain irregular to the end. (See Photo. 4)

A Hypothesis on the Cultural Background of the Northeast

With the help of Mr. Manit Vallibhotama, the former chief curator of the Department of Fine Arts who used to make several archaeological surveys to various parts in the Northeast, we have been able to develop a tentative framework for cultural background in the study of the Northeast as follows.

In the historic period, urban areas developed along the basins of the rivers *Mun* and *Chi*; the people practised wet rice cultivation as their main economic concern. Their cities and towns were established in the middle of the flooded land which was suitable only for such cultivation. They followed *Hinayana* Buddhism, although some elements from Hinduism

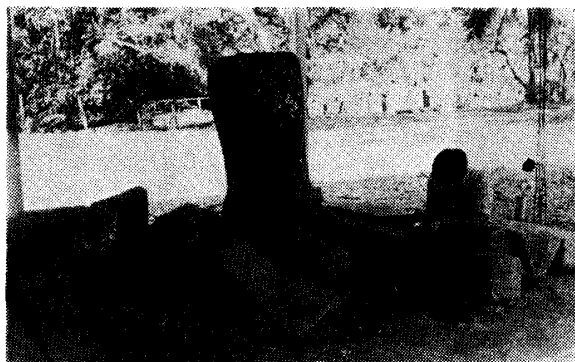


Photo. 5 Fragments of a standing Buddha of Dvaravati Style found at the ancient city of Muang Sema, Nakorn Rajsima.

and *Mahayana* Buddhism were allowed to mix with it. This is evident from the presence of the *Dvaravati* culture which has, as its essence, Hinayana Buddhism. This is reflected in the sculptures, architecture and art designs of religious monuments and objects found all over the region. (Vallibhotama 1968) The most convincing evidence of this type of culture are *stupas*, big stone images of the Buddha (See Photo. 5), and boundary stones, some of which were carved with scenes from the life of the Buddha, the figures of the Wheel of Law. (See Photo. 6)

As viewed from the data in the inscription stones and the characteristics of the monuments and objects in the later periods, it can be stated that around the 8th century A.D. Khmer civilization, which had Hinduism and Mahayana Buddhism as its main elements, spread into the Northeast and made headway in the basin along the southern bank of the *Mun* River (Vallibhotama 1969). Probably many cities and towns developed during this



Photo. 6 A carved boundary stone of Dvaravati Art found in Nakorn Rajsima.



Photo. 7 The stone lintel of a Khmer sanctuary found in *Surin*.

period and most of the large Khmer religious sanctuaries (See Photo. 7) were constructed in this area. Further north of the *Mun* River, in the basin of the *Chi* River, a few Khmer temples were found, but the area was still dominated by the Hinayana Buddhist culture. Khmer cultural influence in the *Mun* River basin probably came to an end when the area was annexed to the Kingdom of *Ayutthaya* in the 15th century A.D., and Hinayana Buddhism was revived. While the southern bank of the river *Mun* was interrupted by Hinduism and *Mahayana* Buddhism and probably also penetrated by the Khmer people, the northern bank of the river *Mun* and the basin of the river *Chi* were continuously Hinayana Buddhist. The region became a part of the Hinayana Buddhist Kingdom of *Lan Chang* or *Lao* and was later incorporated into Thai territory where it has remained until today.

This hypothetical framework, though it serves to delineate two cultural areas which fit the distribution of the two ethnic groups i.e. the Laos or Thai-Lao in the region north of the river *Mun*, and the Khmer in the area south of the river *Mun* (particularly in the provinces of *Nakhon Ratchasima*, *Buri Ram*, *Si Sa-Ket* and *Surin*), is not at all valid in the understanding of the society and culture of the Northeast. More extensive surveys and intensive excavations and studies in the key cities and towns are required, if we are to determine the course of urban development and decline in the region. Absolute chronology and a detailed historical geography are needed for further research into the historical relationships between the Northeast and the rest of Southeast Asia. This is particularly important in reference to the lost kingdoms of *Funan* and *Chenla*, mentioned in the Chinese sources and the kingdoms of *Kotrabun* and *Janasa*, mentioned in the local sources.

The Need for Preparing an Inventory of the Ancient Sites

When looking at the condition of the earthworks in the Northeast nowadays, unfortunately we must say that they are in a most deteriorated condition. In the first place, they have been and still are neglected by the authorities concerned; that is, they have not been surveyed properly, nor registered as ancient monuments of the nation. Such registration

would prevent destruction by any intruders. Now they are left for clearance by plantations, or for building construction by the people. Many of the religious sites which are located in these earthworks have been destroyed and plundered by thieves and treasure hunters as well as by villagers, ignorantly digging.

In addition, the rate of destruction of the ancient sites has recently been accelerated by the socio-economic development programmes initiated by the government. The construction of roads and highways has, in many places, cut through the ancient towns and cities, thus destroying their walls and many archaeological mounds. The building of dams and irrigation canals has caused some ancient cities to be erased and completely flooded by water. All of these conditions are contributing to the drastic change in the topography of the Northeast, and have adversely effected our chances of reconstructing the historical geography of the Northeast, which must be done if an overall picture of the history of this region is to be developed.

With the devastating conditions of various ancient towns in the Northeast, it is urgent that all the ancient towns and other earthworks should be surveyed and studied at once. What needs to be prepared immediately is an inventory of the ancient sites. This can be done by mapping out all the ancient towns and cities from aerial photographs and gathering all the data from documents and field trips and putting all the information in a unified directory. The directory should consist of a map of the Northeast showing the distribution of the ancient cities and towns and a picture of each site, along with some brief information about its location, size, relative period, type and history if available. This inventory, if finished, will be of paramount use to researcher, in that it will help them not only to see a particular town and its environment but also the distribution of urban areas and centres or, in short, the overall picture of the historical geography of the Northeast.

Further, it will help researchers in planning their field study. For example, it would give them an idea how to approach the site, how much time and money must be spent, how many persons should participate, and what kind of equipment they would have to use. And above all, the inventory would provide data for the researchers to form their hypothesis as well as to use in writing up their theses.

Conclusion

The aim of this presentation has been to demonstrate that there is an urgent need for preparation of an inventory of the ancient sites in the Northeast of Thailand, before they have been lost forever due to the drastic change in the topography of the region which is being caused by the economic development programmes of the government and the Mekong Valley Project of the United Nations. This inventory of ancient sites, when finished, will be of paramount use to further study and research of the society and culture of the local population

of the Northeast. First, it will serve to guide the archaeologists in conducting their surveys, selecting key sites for excavations and registering the unknown sites as the national monuments.

Second, the inventory will provide researchers with some perspectives concerning the overall picture of the historical geography of the entire region in connection with the other parts of the country. And third, since most of the ancient cities and towns are located in the alluvial plains of the rivers *Mun* and *Chi*, the inventory will serve to indicate the distribution of the urban areas where wet rice cultivation was practised as the main economic concern of the population. The remains of these ancient cities and towns will provide important data for archaeologists and historians to use and study in their attempts to bridge the gap between the prehistoric and historic periods in Thailand. Consequently, such a study will help shed light on some missing links in the ancient history of Southeast Asia, particularly with reference to the kingdoms of *Funan* and *Chenla*.

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